

SHORT NOTES

Grey squirrel on Great Cumbrae Island

P. G. Moore

University Marine Biological Station Millport, Isle of Cumbrae, Scotland KA28 0EG
E-mail: pmoore@millport.gla.ac.uk

It is with regret that I report the first sightings of the grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) on Great Cumbrae Island. Several reliable observers have spoken to me about having recently seen individual grey squirrels on Cumbrae: in Craigilea Wood (two sightings) and two sightings in the trees behind Marine Parade. O. S. Grid references for these sightings are, respectively: NS176564 and NS173546. The earliest sighting was made in November 2008. It is not clear whether one squirrel or several is / are involved. It seems at least possible that some misguided person has seen fit to release this alien species onto the island illegally. Although grey squirrels can swim well, using their back feet (Southern, 1964; see photograph at <http://www.uksafari.com/greysquirrels5.htm>) it seems unlikely that one, and most unlikely that several, might have swum across from the mainland across at least 1.75km of open sea. Grey squirrels invaded the island of Anglesey in the late 1960s (either by swimming or using the road bridge; the latter perhaps more likely given the speed of the tidal stream through the narrower Menai Strait; see <http://www.rcdsquirrels.info/bountv.html>) but no bridge spans the wider gap from the mainland to Cumbrae. Conceivably, a squirrel might have 'hitch-hiked' on a lorry coming over on the ferry from Largs. Grey squirrels have turned up on the Isle of Wight from time to time and, in 2008, a grey squirrel was speculated to have reached the Highlands on the back of a lorry carrying straw bales (Cramb, 2008), so these possibilities cannot be ruled out. Were there to prove to be several greys at large, however, this would tend to indicate a deliberate release. It is to be hoped that appropriate action might be taken to halt the spread of this unwanted interloper. Trapping has significantly reduced the grey squirrel population of Anglesey, to the benefit of their local native red squirrel (*S. vulgaris*) population. It is realised that Great Cumbrae has an insufficient quantity of joined-up woodland habitat of appropriate tree species to support a viable population of red squirrels (and none has ever been recorded from the island; see Gibson & Shillaker, 1974). So, sadly, this island could probably never become an island refuge for the native species. But the absence of the American invader had, until now, been

another characteristic feature of the mammalian fauna of this island. No more. Scottish Natural Heritage has been informed of this development.

REFERENCES

- Cramb, A. (2008). First grey squirrel spotted in Highlands. *Daily Telegraph*, 28 April 2008.
Gibson, J. A. & Shillaker, R. O. (1974). Notes on the mammals of the Cumbrae Islands. *The Western Naturalist* 3, 23-30.
Southern, H. N. (editor) (1964). *The Handbook of British Mammals*. Blackwell Scientific Publications, Oxford.
-

The River Endrick ox-bow revisited

John Mitchell

22 Muirpark Way, Drymen, by Glasgow G63 0DX

In a previous issue of this journal, a description was given of the early stages in the transition of a newly created backwater to an ox-bow lake in the lower flood plain of the River Endrick on Loch Lomondside (Mitchell, 2004). Since then, river borne sediments have continued to build-up at both the inlet and outlet to the backwater, although trampling of these deposits of silt and sand by large numbers of summer grazing cattle is preventing the developing ox-bow lake from being completely sealed-off from the new course of the river. From a biological standpoint, this interesting site has already produced two noteworthy records. First was the appearance and establishment within the backwater of the narrow-fruited water-starwort *Callitriche palustris*, a species newly described for Britain and Ireland and at present known in Scotland only from the Endrick Valley (Lansdown, 2008). Then came the nesting of a pair of little ringed plovers *Charadrius dubius* on an exposed gravel bed in the new stretch of the river, the water level having dropped substantially during the exceptional dry spring of 2010. The parent birds successfully reared two young to the flying stage by early July, fortuitously just before all of the gravel beds were once more submerged following the resumption of the more usual rain pattern. This would appear to represent the first occurrence of the little ringed plover nesting in the Loch Lomond catchment area, reflecting a recent northward trend in the species' breeding range in this country.

REFERENCES

- Mitchell, J. (2004). The early stages in the development of an ox-bow lake beside the River Endrick. *The Glasgow Naturalist* 24(2), 115-118.